

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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NATIONWIDE STEEL SHOT FIELD TESTS SCHEDULED FOR DUCK AND GOOSE HUNTING THIS FALL

Twenty-four National Wildlife Refuges in all four migratory waterfowl flyways will field test steel shotgun ammunition this fall to compare its effectiveness with lead shot for duck and goose hunting and to acquaint hunters with its capabilities and gather their opinions.

Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, said this is the third year such tests have been conducted, but this year's program will be far more extensive than earlier efforts.

The Fish and Wildlife Service in July published proposed regulations banning the use of lead shotgun ammunition starting in the Atlantic Flyway in 1976, in the Mississippi Flyway in 1977, and in parts of the Central and Pacific Flyways in 1978. The proposal is designed to stop further dropping of lead pellets in waterfowl habitat. Spent lead pellets are often eaten by ducks and geese, resulting in lead poisoning and death to tens of thousands of birds each year. Steel is the only practical non-toxic substitute for lead currently available.

The tests are being conducted as part of a continuing process of collecting scientific data on lead poisoning of waterfowl. In 1972, tests were held at seven refuges; in 1973 at 16 refuges, and this year at 24 refuges where over a quarter of a million rounds of steel shot will be fired.

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In this year's program, emphasis will be placed on testing shotgun loads for geese by providing hunters unmarked shells of both lead and steel and observing the results. Moreover, duck loads will be tested again to gain additional information.

In 1972, over 70,000 rounds of steel shot were used. The number of birds bagged by each hunter was very close to the number expected if lead had been used. Downed but unretrieved birds occurred with about the same frequency as expected for lead shot. There were indications that more shots were fired for each bird bagged with steel loads than would have been the case with lead.

In 1973, over 80,000 rounds of steel shot were used, and again the effectiveness of lead and steel shot for ducks was nearly identical. Too few geese were included in the samples to show significant differences between lead and steel shot. The results, however, suggest that lead was more effective as 124 geese were dropped per 1,000 shots fired with steel and 163 geese per 1,000 shots of lead. Emphasis is being placed on geese this year to better document this aspect.

In addition to the tests on National Wildlife Refuges this fall, the States of Maryland, Indiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Oregon will conduct similar programs at State hunting sites.

In addition to the firing tests at refuges the Fish and Wildlife Service will collect data on what degree and rate ducks and geese ingest spent steel shot pellets on areas where steel is used.

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